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Items for information

Human settlements statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for information, the report of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) presenting the conclusions and recommendations of the Peer Review Meeting on Slum Estimation, held in New York from 3 to 6 April 2008.

* E/CN.3/2009/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 4 (E/2008/24)*, chap. I.B.



Report of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in response to the request of the Statistical Commission for information on the status of human settlements statistics. The report summarizes the activities undertaken by UN-Habitat pursuant to that request as related to monitoring the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 7, target 11. As noted on the UN-Habitat website: "The United Nations Millennium Declaration recognizes the dire circumstances of the world's urban poor. It articulates the commitment of Member States to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by the year 2020".¹

II. Background and objectives of the Peer Review Meeting

2. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) convened and conducted a Peer Review Meeting on Slum Estimation in New York from 3 to 6 April 2006. The Meeting was attended by participants from Brazil, the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children Fund, the World Bank, the Population Council and the following academic institutions: Harvard University, New York University and Purdue University.

3. The major purpose of the meeting was to provide input into the process initiated by UN-Habitat regarding the definition of a slum-dweller and the conditions/indicators used in the measurement of slum dwelling.

III. Peer Review findings and recommendations

A. Definition of slum-dweller

4. To improve the lives of slum-dwellers it is crucial to know *how many there are, what their basic needs are*, in terms of shelter, water, sanitation, health, education and employment, and *where they are located*. The first question had been addressed in 2003 as an immediate response to the need for monitoring target 11 on slum-dwellers through the undertaking of slum estimations based on microdata from household surveys and censuses. Responses to the other two questions entail a needs assessment for slum-dwellers and a methodology measurement issue.

5. The Peer Review Group noted the concerns regarding the indicator for slum-dwellers expressed in their reports by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators² and the Statistical Commission Friends of the Chair.³ The Peer Review Group agrees that the work of UN-Habitat on

¹ See <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=312>.

² See <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=IAEG.htm>.

³ See the report of the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goal indicators (E/CN.3/2006/15), submitted to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session in March 2006.

preparing an operational definition of slum-dwellers for statistical and policy analysis purposes has been conscientious and impressive in its scope and attention to monitoring progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal target on slum-dwellers. The Peer Review Group understands that UN-Habitat should continue to publish monitoring estimates of numbers of slum-dwellers but recommends that these be issued along with estimates of the proportion of the urban population affected by shelter deprivation (lack of improved water, lack of improved sanitation, lack of sufficient living area, lack of durable housing or lack of secure tenure). The Group agrees that further research on the integration of national census data and data from geographical information systems should be supported.

6. The Peer Review Group recognized that not all slums were homogeneous and that not all slum-dwellers suffered from the same degree of deprivation. The degree of deprivation depends on how many of the four conditions used to measure slums (poor access to improved water, poor access to sanitation, non-durable housing and insufficient living area) are prevalent within a slum household. As slum measurement now stands, it will not be possible to appreciate the degree of deprivation of a slum household, a dimension which may be important for policymakers. Programmes and policies required for water are not the same as those required for sanitation or housing. Also, in terms of monitoring for a given country within a given period, the proportion of slum-dwellers may remain the same even as the type of deprivation has changed. As the measurement now stands, only the elimination of all deficiencies in a given household would be registered as signifying an improvement. The Peer Review Group recommends the classification of slum-dwellers by type of deprivation which can later be aggregated into "moderately deprived" and "severely deprived" (two or more deficiencies). While reduction in a deficiency for a severely deprived household could still leave its members with a deficiency, it might nonetheless move them out of the ranks of the severely deprived.

7. The Peer Review Group noted the apparent "disconnect" that has been observed by many housing statistics specialists between the concept of slum focused on the population living in substandard living quarters, and that focused on geographical localities where there is a high concentration of substandard housing. The latter concept is often cited as more appropriate intuitively and best suited to user needs. However, the Peer Review Group also appreciates the technical problems of sampling and compilation that the geographical concept entails, as well as the wide range of circumstances found in some countries where there are significant proportions of higher-quality housing in "slum" districts and substandard living quarters in richer districts. It recommends further research and analysis of country experiences and alternative definitions along the lines already undertaken by UN-Habitat, with a view to revisiting the recommended methodologies in time for the 2010 data reporting period. The Peer Review Group agrees that further research on the integration of national census data and data from geographical information systems with traditional data compilation and analysis programmes in this field is a particularly promising area of further work, one that should be strongly supported. Small-area poverty mapping is a good example of valuable work along these lines that should be pursued.

B. Data gaps

8. The Peer Review Group agrees with the Statistical Commission Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goals indicators that imputed country data should not be published at the country level and should be used with caution in the compilation of regional estimates (see E/CN.3/2006/15, paras. 27 and 60). It recommends close collaboration with countries to make the best use of country data sources and to ensure understanding of the UN-Habitat methodology used to achieve international comparability. Where the national methodology gives very different results from the UN-Habitat results and it is not possible to reconcile the differences through consultation, the national results and the reasons for the differences should also be noted in UN-Habitat data dissemination, as has been done, for example, with World Bank estimates of extreme poverty. Because of their size in their respective regions, it is particularly important to ensure appropriate consultation with Brazil, China and India on estimates for those countries. The Peer Review Group agrees that there is minimal benefit to be derived from expending scarce resources on data compilation and slum estimates for the developed regions, as it is the conditions in the developing regions that are the main focus of the Habitat Agenda⁴ and Millennium Summit development goals.

C. Projections

9. The Peer Review Group agrees with the Statistical Commission Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goals indicators that projection methodologies for urban population and slums are of limited usefulness and should be thoroughly reviewed. It recognizes there can be some benefit in running simple extrapolation exercises to test "what-if?" scenarios, but recommends that the results be carefully presented and documented so as to ensure that they are not seriously misleading or misinterpreted as "forecasts".

D. International comparability

10. The Peer Review Group commends the work of UN-Habitat on developing international comparability in its statistics and notes that such comparability is one means of promoting high standards of quality in data collection and compilation in countries. It also commends the considerable efforts of UN-Habitat to work with countries directly and bilaterally in two extensive rounds of regional workshops designed to promote improved housing statistics and to assist countries in compiling and analysing those statistics from their census programmes on a small-area basis. UN-Habitat was also an active member of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses preparatory group, in 2005 and 2006. It recommends that UN-Habitat continue to pursue both objectives, in close cooperation with its national and international partners in statistics, with the long-term objective of achieving an internationally agreed set of standards and guidelines that can readily be adapted to countries' diverse needs and data-collection programmes.

⁴ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.IV.6), chap. I, resolution I, annex II.

IV. Conclusion

11. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the continued commitment and efforts of UN-Habitat to improve human settlement statistics.